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SUBJECT: SECRETARY OF DEFENSE GATES'S MEETINGS WITH TURKISH
MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE AND CHIEF OF THE TURKISH
GENERAL STAFF, FEBRUARY 6, 2010

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Jeffrey for reason 1.4 (b, d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (SecDef) met with Turkish Minister of National Defense Mehmet Vecdi Gonul (MND Gonul) and the Chief of the Turkish Genral Staff General Ilker Basbug (Gen Basbug) in separate meetings during his bilateral visit to Ankara on February 6, 2010. SecDef thanked Gonul and Basbug for Turkey's valuable contributions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Gonul stressed Turkey's important role in Afghanistan as a Muslim country in the Alliance and Basbug hailed continuing U.S. and Turkish support to Afghan National Security Force training and assistance to the Pakistani Armed Forces. SecDef and Gonul discussed the importance of a Turkish role in European Missile Defense. On combating the PKK in Turkey, SecDef agreed with Basbug that the key to further progress is greater Iraqi cooperation with Turkey. SecDef highlighted to Gonul opportunities to increase military capability and gain economic benefits through choosing Sikorsky helicopters or Raytheon Patriot PAC-3 systems in ongoing tenders.

Bilateral Relationship

12. (C) MND Gonul stressed the importance of the SecDef's visit, noting that it built on the Prime Minister's December meeting in Washington with President Obama in December. SecDef agreed on the importance of the bilateral relationship, and recalled that Turkish-American solidarity extended from the Korean War through the present in Afghanistan. SecDef said he believed that Turkey was undervalued as an Ally by many Europeans.

Afghanistan

13. (S/NF) In both meetings SecDef conveyed U.S. appreciation for Turkey's contributions to Afghanistan -- including providing troops, OMLTs, POMLTs, a PRT, commanding RC-Capital, providing access through the Incirlik air base, and allowing the transit of non-lethal goods to Afghanistan through Turkish air space. Regarding Turkey's contributions to ISAF, GEN Basbug said that "we are trying to do our best" with the PRT in Wardak province and command of RC-Capital. He observed that the hardest aspect of the fight against the Taliban was differentiating between the real Taliban and those that merely helped or supported the Taliban or even indigenous forces not aligned with the Taliban. However, Basbug was hopeful that Allies could win over some of those who were sympathetic to the Taliban through a reintegration strategy.

14. (S/NF) Gonul emphasized that Turkey had a "special connection" with the people of Afghanistan due to common Islamic roots. Turkey's involvement in ISAF offered a way of refuting insurgents' attempts to use Islam as ideological justification for their efforts. SecDef agreed that having Muslim soldiers participate in ISAF drives home the fact that the fight in Afghanistan is not against Islam but rather against terrorists who "pervert Islam."

15. (S/NF) Basbug was upbeat about prospects for success in Afghanistan, noting that the positive tone of GEN McChrystal's brief at the NATO CHODs conference had inspired more optimism among his colleagues than had his original September brief on his assessment. SecDef said he agreed with McChrystal's latest assessment that the situation was serious but no longer deteriorating, but warned that no one should exaggerate how well things were going. At the Istanbul Ministerial as well, he said, there had clearly been a change in mood among the Ministers present. Significantly, Defense Minister Wardak had told him that for the first time he had begun to hope for a successful outcome in Afghanistan.

16. (S/NF) Basbug described the terrorist attacks in Kabul on January 18th as serious, but said that the ANSF response ultimately offered an "outstanding" example of how to manage a very complex operation. Nine terrorists were killed and two were captured, and the terrorists did not ultimately achieve their objectives. Describing post-attack operations as "a cause for optimism," Basbug said that the Afghan forces involved showed they were motivated, well disciplined, and well prepared for the fight. Basbug then reviewed Turkey's plans for training the ANA and the ANP, stressing that the

priority was to provide unit training both in Turkey and in Afghanistan. So far, he said, Turkey had trained three Afghan companies and would open a training center in Kabul to do battalion-level training soon.

Pakistan

17. (S/NF) Basbug also raised Pakistan, recalling his October visit at the invitation of General Kayani. During his visit to Swat province he had witnessed a hundred-fold improvement in security since his previous visit, citing the return of civilian populations to the region as a clear success for Pakistani forces. Sec Def agreed, observing that the degree of success by Pakistani forces ran counter to all of our intelligence predictions.

18. (S/NF) Basbug highlighted the TGF's support for Pakistan's armed forces - especially on logistics and maintenance of equipment, including spare parts for their Air Force. He said that although overall relationships with Pakistan were sometimes difficult, cooperation remained solid at the military level.

Counterterrorism

19. (S/NF) Basbug raised the issue of Turkey's protracted fight against the PKK, highlighting progress over the past year due to the elimination of key leaders, divisions within PKK ranks, and dwindling morale of PKK fighters. This progress, Basbug said, was the result of increased U.S.-Turkish cooperation since the end of 2007, including intelligence sharing, provision of ISR support, and use U.S. UAV assets in Northern Iraq. Basbug concluded by requesting additional support from the United States government, Iraqi government, and KRG. Drawing a parallel to U.S. actions in the cross-border region of Pakistan, Basbug said that in order to continue to eliminate the PKK threat, Turkey needs more support from all stakeholders to pursue the top PKK leadership.

¶10. (S/NF) Addressing Turkey's outstanding Reaper UAV requests, SecDef reaffirmed to Basbug that the U.S. is committed to the sale of Reapers to Turkey, but offered the caveat that the sale would first have to be approved by Congress. SecDef added that the Pentagon is also looking at additional reconnaissance capabilities in addition to the Predators currently flown by the U.S. The U.S. he said, is considering some UAVs with shorter dwell times, which have proven to be effective in Iraq. Regarding current UAV support -- which already provides an average of 16-17 hours of coverage daily -- SecDef said that Gen Odierno will look at ways to surge up to 24-hour coverage when necessary, e.g. for operations involving high-value targets.

¶11. (S/NF) SecDef emphasized that Turkey's dialogue with KRG was very important. In his meeting the previous week with KRG President Barzani, SecDef said he pressed him once again to work with the PKK to persuade them to abandon violence. Basbug agreed and said Turkey's dialogue with the KRG was particularly important as a measure to persuade the KRG to take a more proactive approach to the PKK.

¶12. (S/NF) Basbug expressed concern about the U.S. drawdown of forces from Iraq, lamenting that while Turkey has been successful in reducing the PKK threat, it will be difficult to finish off the threat after U.S. forces leave. He concluded that Turkey would need to "finish the problem" before the U.S. drawdown was complete.

Missile Defense and Iran

¶13. (S/NF) MND Gonul said he considered the new US Phased Adaptive approach better than the previous Administration's approach, since the previous system did not cover Turkey. SecDef agreed, noting that the Polish and Romanian agreement to host SM-3 missiles. He further emphasized that without a radar based in Turkey, significant areas in the eastern part of the country would not be covered by the system.

¶14. (S/NF) Gonul told SecDef that discussions about the radar were ongoing within the Turkish government and inquired about

what alternate sites the U.S. was considering. SecDef responded that other countries in Southeast Europe might be interested in hosting the radar, but reiterated that Turkey was the optimal site. SecDef explained that one of the reasons why he had embraced the new administration's approach was that it provided protection for Allies and troops earlier than the previous program without reducing protection of the U.S.

¶15. (S/NF) Turning to Iran, Gonul cited the enrichment program and acknowledged that Ankara is "concerned about the Iranian threat," but said that the international community does not yet have evidence that there is a weapons program. Gonul said that even though Turkey does not expect an attack from Iran, the threat from Iran to Turkey's European allies would make an air defense capability important. (Comment: His acknowledgement of an Iranian threat to Europe diverges from previous Turkish statements underplaying such a threat.) He repeated that the system would be designed to defend all of Europe, and not solely Turkey.

¶16. (S/NF) SecDef counseled that if Iran goes forward with a nuclear weapons program, other states in the region were likely to proliferate as well. Additionally, there was a good chance Israelis would at some point decide that military action was necessary. As Turkey would inevitably be unable to sit out on any conflict in the region, it is important to be prepared militarily and Ankara should not hesitate to acquire defensive systems, even as the international community works to stop Iran's efforts.

¶17. (C//NF) During his meeting with Gonul, SecDef advised that Turkey had opportunities to increase its military capabilities while gaining economic benefits by selecting U.S. companies in currently open tenders. First, Sikorsky, was prepared to guarantee that for every helicopter produced in Turkey and bought by Turkey, Sikorsky would produce a second helicopter in Turkey for export. SecDef explained that in addition to providing modern equipment for Turkey, this offer would provide hundreds of millions of dollars in export revenue. Gonul replied that Sikorsky had told him Turkey was the largest consumer of Sikorsky helicopters after the U.S. and that Turkey already was buying 70 Sea Hawk helicopters (as well as 14 heavy lift helos (CH-47s) from Boeing). The tender for the new project had been running for two years and the short list included Sikorsky and an Italian company. Gonul believes Sikorsky has a good chance to win.

¶18. (C//NF) A second opportunity involves the co-production of Raytheon PAC-3 Patriot systems. Demand for these systems in the Gulf States could potentially yield hundreds of millions of dollars in export revenue. SecDef stressed that "nothing can compete with the PAC-3 when it comes to capabilities." These opportunities are a chance for Turkey to earn revenue while simultaneously enhancing capabilities and creating jobs.

¶19. (C//NF) Gonul said this competition right now was between the U.S., Russia and China, but noted that French MoD Morin had indicated in Istanbul that the French would also make a bid including co-production arrangements. Gonul observed that as this was an expensive project and he had limited familiarity with the PAC-3: he needed to be careful to make the right choice. SecDef pointed out that the Raytheon package would be easier to integrate with the command and control of the U.S. and others using the same system.

Joint Strike Fighter

¶20. (C) Gonul said Turkey was pleased to be part of the joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program and noted his belief that it was important for Turkey to have maintenance facilities in Turkey. SD remarked that because the program was recently restructured, cost estimates were now realistic. SecDef noted he had directed the JSF program manager to put additional funding in the FY2011 and FY2012 budget for JSF. However, because of contractor delays, the timeline had slipped about a year. In conclusion, Gonul raised Turkey's F-16 modernization program and expressed concern that new upgrades precluded Turkish access to computer systems and software modification previously allowed. Turkish Under

Secretary for Industry Bayar told SecDef he would pursue this issue in greater detail with Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Ash Carter.

¶21. (U) SecDef has cleared this cable. Drafted by OSD staff. Jeffrey

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